1. Purpose

The capstone course is designed to provide students with the opportunity to integrate and synthesize what they have learned during the entire MCJ course of study. The project also provides a process and structure for SPA faculty to determine whether MCJ graduates have attained the goals of the program: knowledge of criminal justice systems and theory; research and practice; critical thinking skills; and written and oral communication skills. The capstone project requires students to demonstrate knowledge of the concepts and principles conveyed in the MCJ curriculum and to apply that knowledge to study a problem confronted by a public or private sector agency. The written and oral products of this seminar provide tangible evidence of a degree candidate’s qualifications and expertise.

In the capstone course, students undertake a client-based project. This project is intended to meet the information needs of a client or agency while also demonstrating and using knowledge and skills students have obtained in the MCJ program.

A client-based project must:
- be undertaken for a client who is affiliated with a public or private agency or organization;
- be of significance and practical use to the client organization; and
- be based on scholarly literature in criminology or criminal justice.

2. Prerequisites

a. The Capstone course should be taken in the student’s last semester of classes before completing the MCJ, though students should identify their client and topic prior to the beginning of the semester;

b. Although a student may take another elective at the same time as 5561, taking more than one additional course is strongly discouraged because of the work required in the capstone course;

c. All core courses must be completed before taking the Capstone course.

3. Selecting a Project

Students may find a client in many ways. The most common routes are these:

- SPA keeps a list of potential clients and their projects for students to contact;
- Students may approach an agency or contact person, meet with them and describe the capstone course, and determine if the agency and/or contact person has a project or problem they would like the student to address.
Client-based projects may NOT be conducted as part of ongoing work responsibilities; however, students may conduct a project for an organization that employs them if that project is outside of their official responsibilities.

Students completing a concentration must pursue a project that is related to their concentration area. Further, their second reader must be a faculty member in the area of the concentration.

4. Course Format and Committee

The Capstone course is guided by a primary instructor. That instructor’s role is to guide the student in selecting a project and specifying its scope, to assist the student as needed in conducting the project, and to provide extensive feedback to the student on various drafts of the project. In order to provide students with the individual attention needed, capstone courses are restricted to no more than 18 students per class. Students may be moved to different sections to accommodate this class size requirement.

Work under the Capstone is guided by a committee comprised of three persons: the first reader (course instructor), a second reader (SPA faculty member), and a third reader (client or substantive expert). All three readers must ultimately approve the project prospectus. All will help the student with the project and will evaluate the final report and presentation, though the first reader serves as the student’s primary guide.

The Second Reader

The second reader should be a fulltime faculty or staff member at SPA. If a student has declared a concentration, the first or second reader must be a faculty member from that concentration area.

If a full-time faculty member with subject-matter expertise is not available, students may select a SPA adjunct faculty member with subject-matter expertise in the area of the project with the approval of the primary instructor. On the UCCS campus, the second reader can be a CU faculty member outside of SPA.

Second readers should be selected because they have expertise in the content area of the project. Students should consult with them early in the process to get recommendations for references to form the foundation of the client-based project and/or suggestions concerning target journals and references for research projects.

The Third Reader

The third reader is the client, i.e., the representative of the organization for which you are conducting the project.

Role of Readers
While the first reader will have the primary responsibility for supervising the student’s project, the second and third readers have responsibility for: (1) approving the student’s project prospectus, (2) commenting on project drafts and approving the final project report, (3) attending and participating in the oral presentation of the project, and (4) evaluating the student’s work. Additionally, the third reader serves to link the student with the client organization and reports on the utility and professionalism of the student’s work for and with the organization.

The first reader determines the student’s grade, but will seek input from other readers to determine the final grade. (See attached rubric used by all readers to assess the project.)

5. Steps to the Project

No incompletes

The student must be able to complete the selected project by the end of the semester. An incomplete grade will be issued only under very exceptional circumstances.

Orientation

All students are required to participate in the orientation session for the capstone course the semester before they plan to enroll. These sessions normally occur about one month before the end of the previous semester. Orientation information will be sent to students taking the online degree and the instructor for the online course will be available to answer their questions. All students who are eligible for taking the capstone are contacted by the student services staff to attend or participate in this orientation.

The orientation prepares students to identify a project and client, as appropriate, and to develop a prospectus in preparation for the beginning of the course.

Preparing for the Beginning of Class

The orientation provides students with information about how to begin their projects. Before the beginning of the semester, students must identify a client and define their topic for the client. Students are encouraged to contact the person who is likely to be their professor for the capstone to discuss their topic and receive assistance. Students also are encouraged to contact potential second and/or third readers during this time to get advice on a focus and references to explore. The prospectus for the project is generally due the second week of the semester, so students must undertake some work before the semester begins to be able to complete the prospectus and begin the project.

Prospectus: Week Two

Students will submit a prospectus describing the goals of their project and the specific questions they hope to answer, and identify the client and agency for which the project will be conducted. Finally, the prospectus names the faculty member(s) and client who
have agreed to serve as second and third readers. Individual instructors in the capstone seminar may have additional or slight variations on their requirements for the prospectus.

*Instructors may advise students who have not submitted an acceptable proposal to drop the course.* This action must be taken before the official add-drop date, so students can drop the course without penalty. Students who are told to drop the course and to re-enroll the next semester will be given specific feedback and instructions from the primary instructor to allow them to begin the capstone more productively the following semester.

**Drafts**

The Capstone report is unlike a traditional term paper in many ways. One way in which it differs is that students submit several drafts and revise those drafts, often extensively, based on feedback from their primary instructor and other readers. The primary instructor will provide students with their expectations and due dates for drafts in their section. Typically, however, students submit at least two drafts with one coming mid-way through the course and constituting the first part of the paper.

Students should check with their second and third readers at each draft to learn whether they prefer to receive the draft after the primary instructor has made suggestions and the student has revised or to receive it at the same time as the primary instructor. Some faculty members prefer to receive the paper after the primary instructor has provided feedback concerning the organization and substance of the paper. However, this delay can require them to read the paper quickly and get feedback to the student. On final drafts, the timeline can become particularly tight, so the student should work closely with the primary faculty member and communicate with second and third readers to establish a time frame for this stage.

Papers should be no longer than 25 double-spaced pages, excluding references, attachments, and figures using APA style. Instructors may provide more specific guidelines.

**Final Report**

Having received feedback from all readers, students should revise their final draft and distribute it to all readers at least one week before the oral presentation. In some cases, instructors may choose to have reports completed after the oral presentation based on feedback from the oral conference. Students will learn the specific details of due dates from their individual instructor’s syllabus.

**Oral Presentation**

Students are expected to make a professional oral presentation, including supportive visual materials such as PowerPoint, overheads, or handouts. Oral presentation sessions typically last around one hour, though the actual presentation is limited to 15 minutes. Since readers have read the paper, the student may choose to focus on particular issues of
interest or to summarize key points. The remainder of the hour is used for questions and discussion. Students are encouraged to practice the presentation to ensure they are organized and are able to convey all the information they desire within the 15 minute time limit. Oral presentations are a part of the student’s final grade.

To schedule the presentation, students should select 3-5 potential dates and times and send them electronically to all readers to identify a time when all can participate. Second and third readers are required to be in attendance, but may participate electronically if circumstances prohibit their actual presence. Once a date and time are identified, students should contact the Student Services staff to obtain a room and any equipment for the presentation and notify the readers of the location. The link to schedule your capstone can be found at:

http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/SPA/CurrentStudents/CapstoneSeminar/Pages/form.aspx

Students who live outside the Denver metro area will arrange an oral presentation making use of software or telecommunications technology. (Distance students may, and occasionally do, choose to come to Denver for the final presentation, but that is not required.)

6. Other Key Issues

Grounding the Project in the Scholarly Criminology and Criminal Justice Literature

All capstone projects include a review of the scholarly literature relevant to the project. Student will have reviewed prominent refereed journals in the field and relevant to the chosen project (e.g., Criminology, Crime and Public Policy, Policing, Police Quarterly, Justice Quarterly).

Collecting and Analyzing Information

Student will support project conclusions with evidence from qualitative or quantitative data. Students may use secondary data or generate primary data.

At this time, the UCD Human Subjects Research Committee Institutional Review Board (HSRC/IRB) has concluded that projects intended for use within an organization do not require their review. However, if a student is collecting original data from a group typically considered as a protected class by IRBs, the faculty member will review the project to insure human subject protections are being considered. On the Colorado Springs campus, IRB approval may be required if any research data are collected from people. Students on that campus should consult their instructor to determine if IRB approval is needed.

Writing and Format
The capstone report demonstrates a student’s ability to communicate information, including scholarly information, in a professional manner. As noted above, students will complete several drafts and should anticipate substantive work on revisions at each stage. Students are required to use APA style.

Supplemental Documentation

All projects, regardless of the type, must draw upon at least three courses the student has completed in the MCJ program. In addition to the project report, students will submit a brief document that describes how the knowledge and skills gained from the designated MCJ courses were used to complete the project. At least one of these three courses must be a core course, and, if the student is completing a concentration, at least one must be a concentration course.

Project Assessment

SPA faculty developed a rubric to describe expectations for capstone projects. This rubric is based on the four goals of the MCJ program: Students will have knowledge of criminology theory, research, and practices; good critical thinking skills; and professional skills to communicate orally and in writing. For each goal, we have developed indicators of proficient performance. Students may use these indicators to guide their own work. (Note the descriptions of various levels of performance are indicators of that level. The nature of capstone projects differs, and not all projects will lend themselves to each descriptor. Nevertheless, these descriptors of levels of performance give students, and readers, a sense for SPA faculty’s expectations regarding performance in each area.)

Readers will use a rubric to report on their judgment of the student’s performance in each relevant area. The primary instructor will, then, determine the grade based on readers’ feedback.